

wrestling

Consistent grappler nears school win mark

By NICK DAWSON
Of the Emerald

The 1977-78 wrestling season has been one of surprises and inconsistencies for Oregon.

The Ducks have beaten three teams ranked in the nation's top 20, and have been rewarded with a spot in the top twenty themselves. Yet their dual meet record for the season is 6-9, possibly owing to the fact they have wrestled many of the nation's best teams.

However, after all the smoke has cleared away, there will be one thing that will be certain at the end of the season. Scott Bliss, Oregon's 150-pounder, will emerge with a school record for

wins in a season, and he will have been a very consistent wrestler in an otherwise inconsistent year.

Scott Bliss came out of Othello, Wash., a small town near the Tri-Cities area in the southeastern part of the state, three years ago. He had already gained a great deal of notoriety while still in high school. He was the state champion for his weight as a junior and a runner-up as a senior.

Bliss had also made a trip with a Washington state high school team to Japan in 1974, and the following year toured Canada with a national high school team. It was in 1975 that he was a national high school champion in both freestyle and greco-roman.

The past two summers, Bliss has competed on the Junior World Team in international competitions.

When he came out of high school, Bliss was recruited heavily by many schools, but the final decision came down to Oregon and Iowa.

He was recruited by Dan Gable, then the assistant, but now head coach, at Iowa, and probably the most famous wrestler in the history of the United States. However, he chose Oregon, though he wasn't offered a full-ride scholarship. He now has a full-ride.

Bliss came to Oregon for a number of reasons. The international program was enticing, and besides, his parents wanted him to wrestle in the area.

"I still don't know if I made the right choice," said Bliss. "I never will know."

However, that's all in the past, and what really matters is Bliss' current success on the wrestling mat. And believe it, he is successful.

At this stage of the season, Bliss has recorded 27 victories, which is just four shy of tying Kevin Kramer's school win record. Though Bliss still has over a month to break the record, it isn't all that important to him.

"I could care less about the record," Bliss said. "Stats and records don't mean a thing. Just because you had more wins than another guy doesn't mean you were better than him." Bliss explained that Oregon has more matches on the schedule this year, so he naturally has more opportunities to win.

"All that counts is what you do in the nationals at the end of the year," stated Bliss.

If you listen to wrestling coach Ron Finley, Bliss will do just fine at the end of the year.

"Scotty's got the best chance on our team of placing in the nationals. He's the most consistent of our wrestlers," Finley said. "I think we could safely say he's the

hardest worker on the team," added Finley.

Hard work has always been second nature to Bliss. It's in this area that Bliss realizes the true value of his coaching.

"You can work hard up to a point, and then say 'I quit.' After that, it's the coach that has to push you," explained Bliss. "I think part of the reason that I work so hard is that I'm not satisfied with myself."

Bliss is particularly unhappy when he loses, especially when he feels he should have won. He has suffered only four losses this year, twice to two different Oregon State wrestlers, once to a Minnesota wrestler he had defeated the day before, and the final time to Joe Zuspan, the top-ranked wrestler in the 150 pound class.

Finley sees some deficiencies in Bliss' wrestling.

"Scott's had a lot of problem with defense and getting away from guys," Finley stated. "Those are his two weakest areas. But his aggressive style makes up for that."

"He's a thrower, which a lot of coaches in the east don't like — and the midwest coaches," said Finley. "It's basically because a lot of throwers don't have good basics — especially defense."

"This is his style. He goes after wins and pins in every match," Finley added. Of Bliss' 13 wins in dual matches, nine have been by superior decision, which means beating an opponent by at least eight points. He has registered two pins among those 13 dual wins.

"He's got a lot of endurance. This shows in Scotty's matches," Finley said. "He starts out slow, and sometimes doesn't even score in the first period. But watch out for the end of the second period and the third period."

Bliss' endurance can be measured in his running workouts. Finley has timed the sophomore in 5:17 and 5:27 splits in the two mile.

Bliss is in his third year at Oregon, having to sit out one year of wrestling with a knee injury. Last year, he won 20 matches, but was pulled out of the Pac-8 championships because he was sick and dehydrated. Last year, Bliss wrestled at 142 pounds, and was struggling constantly to make weight.

"That's the whole difference between this year and last year. That was the worst three months of my life," he said.

After Bliss ends his mat career at Oregon, he hopes that a degree in physical education will help him find a job as a coach. "Yeah, I'd like to be a wrestling coach. But I'm interested in a lot of sports. I'd like to coach a lot of sports," Bliss said.

For now though, Scott Bliss will just concentrate on bettering his already impressive mat skills, working year round to improve as he has since the ninth grade.

"Scotty's one of the best wrestlers in the country," Finley said matter-of-factly about his ace.

Just goes to show you hard work does pay off.

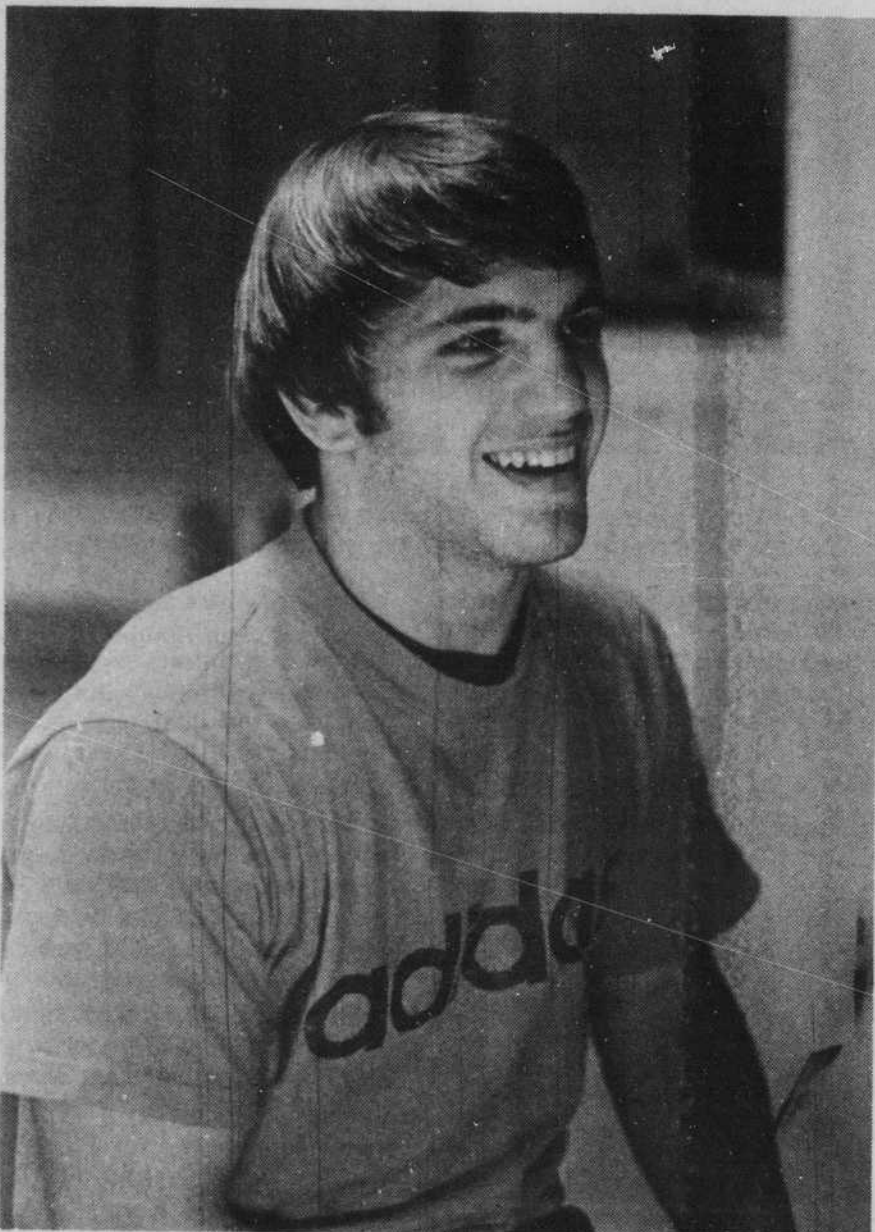


Photo by Mike Baer

Scott Bliss was a successful wrestler at Othello High School, and he has continued the trend at Oregon. Scott is just five wins away from setting a single season win record.



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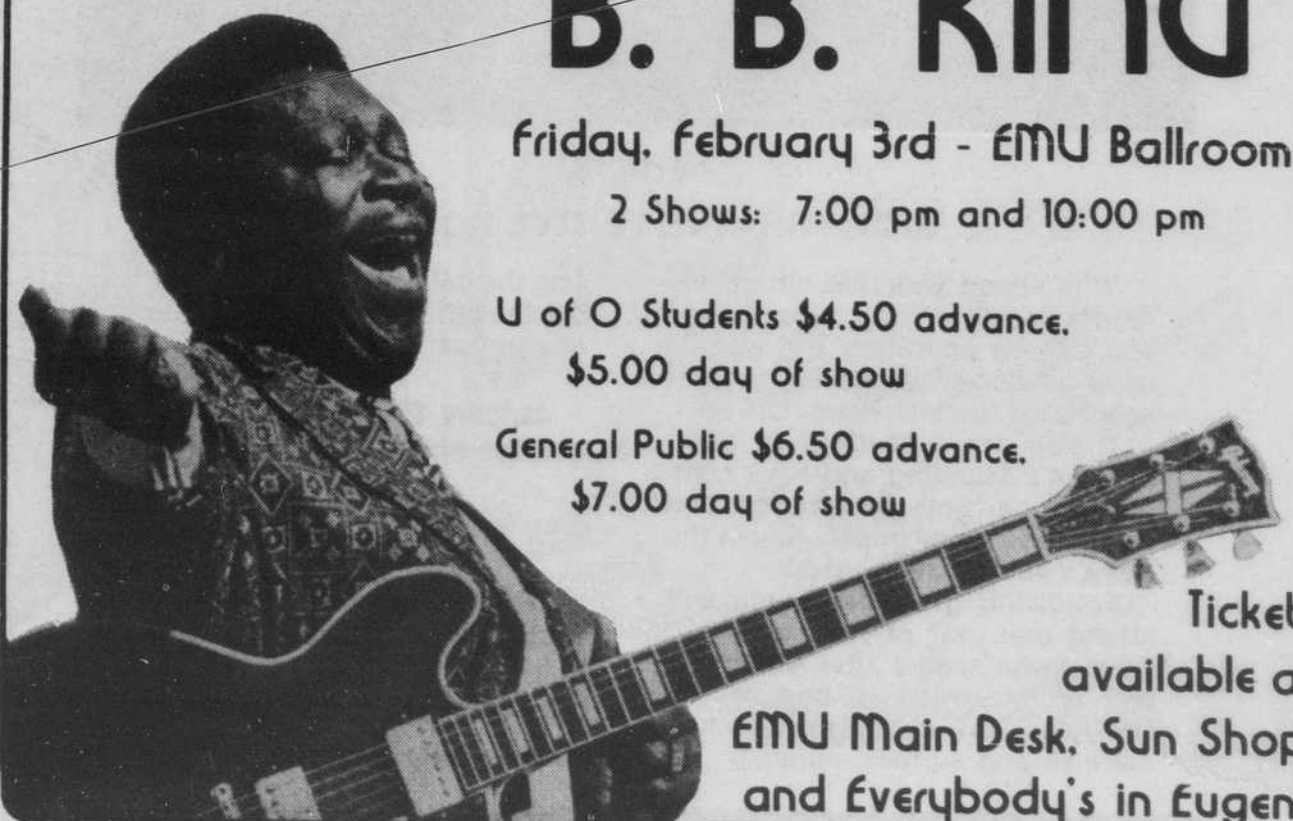
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